

COMPREHENSIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Guidance for Rhode Island's Early Education Programs

High-quality educational programs engage in an ongoing, comprehensive self-assessment and quality improvement process to ensure that young children benefit from educational services that:

- Are supported by strong program systems and highly performing staff,
- Comply with the educational and structural standards set forth in the Rhode Island Department of Education's Standards Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program standards,
- Comply with other federal, state, or local regulations governing the program,
- Result in improved outcomes for children.

Standard 6.8 of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program standards states that:

(6.8) On an ongoing basis and at least once each year, the program will engage in a comprehensive self-assessment to determine compliance with the structural and educational program standards contained herein and all other standards and regulations governing the program and the program's effectiveness in meeting needs of children and families. This assessment shall include a review and analysis of program-wide child assessment information that reveals patterns and trends. The process shall involve families and staff. As a result of this self-assessment, the program shall document its improvement plan, which shall include priority goals, specific strategies for attaining each goal, and progress towards goal attainment.

The following guidance will assist programs to develop and implement a system for comprehensive self-assessment and program improvement:

Planning for Self-Assessment

6.8 (a) On an ongoing basis and at least once each year, the program will engage in a comprehensive self-assessment to determine compliance with the structural and educational program standards contained herein and all other standards and regulations governing the program and the program's effectiveness in meeting needs of children and families.

When developing a plan for self-assessment, program directors should consider the following:

- When the self-assessment will take place,
- Who should be involved in the self-assessment process,

- Tools that will be used to gather and document program information.

When will self-assessment occur?

The Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program standards state that self-assessment must occur on an ongoing basis and at least once each year.

Program administrators should monitor compliance with federal, state, and local regulations in an ongoing way so that they can respond proactively to issues that emerge throughout the program year. Strategies commonly used by program managers include:

- Facilities checklists,
- Classroom observations,
- File review,
- Regularly scheduled supervision sessions.

In addition to ongoing monitoring, programs will want to plan and implement a comprehensive review of all standards and regulations governing the program at least once each year. Think about scheduling a comprehensive self-assessment at a time during the program year when:

- Services are well underway so that assessment information is an accurate reflection of the quality of program services,
- Time remains before the end of the program year to correct issues that emerge in order to maximize outcomes for children and families currently participating in the program,
- The results can be used to inform the development of the program's quality improvement and professional development plan.

Who should be involved in the self-assessment process?

The Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program standards state that the self-assessment process shall involve families and staff.

The number of persons involved in self-assessment varies among programs and depends greatly on the size of the program and complexity of the organization.

Families and staff can play two roles in the self-assessment process. They can:

- *provide information* to program leaders through interviews and surveys to identify strengths and issues and help determine if the program is in compliance with standards
- serve on a self-assessment team and help to *collect information* needed to identify strengths and issues and determine compliance

When putting together a self-assessment team to collect information, administrators may want to recruit representatives from:

- Program management,
- Families of participating children,
- Board of Directors,
- Teaching staff
- Staff from other segments of the program.

It is the role of the self-assessment team to gather program information and work with other members of the team to analyze program information to determine program strengths and areas to improve.

When selecting team members, consider the different skills and qualities that the assignment will require. In addition to technical expertise, participants serving on the assessment team should have the following skills and qualities:

- Observation skills,
- Interview skills,
- Reading and documentation skills,
- Objectivity,
- Professional conduct,
- Ability to maintain confidentiality.

The assignments given to team members should correspond with their experience and expertise. When making assignments, be sure that only appropriate staff are allowed access to personnel records, children's files and other confidential information.

Self-assessment team members should receive a thorough orientation so that they are fully prepared to complete their responsibilities successfully. The self-assessment orientation should include:

- Discussion of the purpose of self-assessment and how the results will be used to drive program improvement,
- Overview of the program's organizational structure and description of program services,
- Overview of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program standards and how they should be interpreted
- Information on how to use the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Self-Assessment and other designated tools to gather program information,
- A review of the multi-method approach that includes observation, interview, and document review,

- Information on how to access the curriculum framework, written plans, and policies and procedures, and other documents,
- Identification of important data sources relevant to their work, such as, outcome measurement data, staff survey results, parent survey, and ongoing monitoring reports,
- Review of the process that will be used and team member assignments,
- Discussion of professional conduct and confidentiality.

What tools will be used to collect and document program information?

Once the program has identified the self-assessment team, recruited and trained the members, team members are ready to engage in the assessment process. Using the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Self-Assessment, plus other tools designated by the program, team members gather program information to determine if the program is in compliance with regulations.

Programs will want to access and adapt the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Self-Assessment designed by the Rhode Island Department of Education. This tool addresses all of the structural and education standards and can be used as one part of a comprehensive self-assessment. Programs will want to adapt and augment this tool so that the self-assessment process can efficiently gather information pertaining to other regulations at the local, state, and federal level that govern the program. Programs should consider building in a mechanism for identifying and documenting program strengths, as well as, conducting staff and family surveys to obtain other perspectives on educational services and structural supports.

The adapted self-assessment tool should guide team members in using a multi-method approach to collect program information. Through observations, interviews, and document review, team members should look for consistency in their findings to make final decisions regarding program strengths and areas to improve.

When inconsistencies are found using this multi-method approach, team members should seek additional information before drawing conclusions. For instance, if the program's written plan outlining child assessment(document review) is consistent with the Education Coordinator's description of child assessment practices (interview), but inconsistent with observed practices in classroom (observation) and information contained in child portfolios (document review), team members will want to conduct additional observations and document review before drawing conclusions about the programs' systems and services.

Analyzing Program Information

Once self-assessment team members have completed their assignments, their work is then shared with program leaders whose task is to:

- Analyze the data,
- Identify patterns and trends,
- Uncover underlying causes and systemic issues,
- Determine priorities for change and improvement.

Before focusing attention to the concerns and needs that emerged from the self-assessment process, programs should take time to identify and document the key strengths and accomplishments of the program. This information will help you to formulate a balanced program perspective. The program will need to draw upon its strengths, as it pursues new levels of quality and improved outcomes for children.

Including Child Assessment Information in the Data Analysis Process

6.8 (b) Self-assessment shall include a review and analysis of program-wide child assessment information that reveals patterns and trends.

In addition to reviewing and analyzing information collected during the comprehensive self-assessment, program leaders must aggregate child assessment information from across the entire program. This profile will allow program leaders to identify significant patterns and trends across the program and uncover areas where children are exceeding expectations, as well as areas where children are not progressing as well as expected.

With this information in hand, program leaders can continue to gather information, explore underlying causes, and begin to formulate strategies to strengthen teaching and learning so that children are making significant progress in all domains and learning goals of the RI Early Learning Standards.

Identifying and Prioritizing Program Improvement Goals

It is likely that a comprehensive self-assessment will reveal many areas where the program can potentially be strengthened. Programs must guard themselves against spreading resources too thin and instead, direct resources to achieving goals that are most important to the livelihood of the program. It is important that program leaders identify and prioritize areas that:

- Negatively impact educational services and outcomes for children,
- Potentially jeopardize licensing status, certification, and/or future funding.

Program leaders will want to identify three areas to address in the final Program Improvement Plan:

1. Health and Safety

First, determine if there are findings that impact or can potentially impact the health and safety of children, families and staff. The program will need to resolve these issues immediately. All health and safety issues are *high priority*.

2. Short-Term Improvements

Second, identify findings that can be addressed and resolved quickly and effectively with minimal time and resources.

3. Long-Term Improvements

Third, identify major areas of concern that require prolonged effort. Long term improvements entail a listing of strategies that typically require time, resources and a commitment of staff.

The program must demonstrate a strong link between its self-assessment findings and the program improvement plan. Once the program has reviewed all areas of concern and identified priorities, it is ready to translate these priorities into program improvement goals.

Examples of program improvement goals might include:

- Develop written guidelines for teachers that define the child assessment process and support teachers in understanding this process,
- Enroll 3 teachers in RIELS Level II training,
- Redesign the staff evaluation process so that it meets all eight components of Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standard 6.11.

Developing Program Improvement Plans

6.8 (d) As a result of this self-assessment, the program shall document its improvement plan, which shall include priority goals, specific strategies for attaining each goal, and progress towards goal attainment.

Once the priority goals are in place, your next task is to develop a program improvement plan by determining the strategies your program will employ to attain each goal. This information is then documented on a goal sheet. As you work through this process, consider ways in which the program can build upon its existing strengths.

Examples of strategies might include:

- Convening a meeting to develop or refine policies and procedures,

- Researching best practice,
- Providing staff training on a particular topic,
- Securing technical assistance,
- Garnering new resources.

The RI Early Learning Standards Level III training introduces program leaders to a format for documenting program improvement plans that includes the identification of priority goals, strategies, progress, and timelines (samples attached). Programs may choose to adopt this format or a similar format that meets the needs of their program. When creating one's own format, be sure to include the elements listed previously.

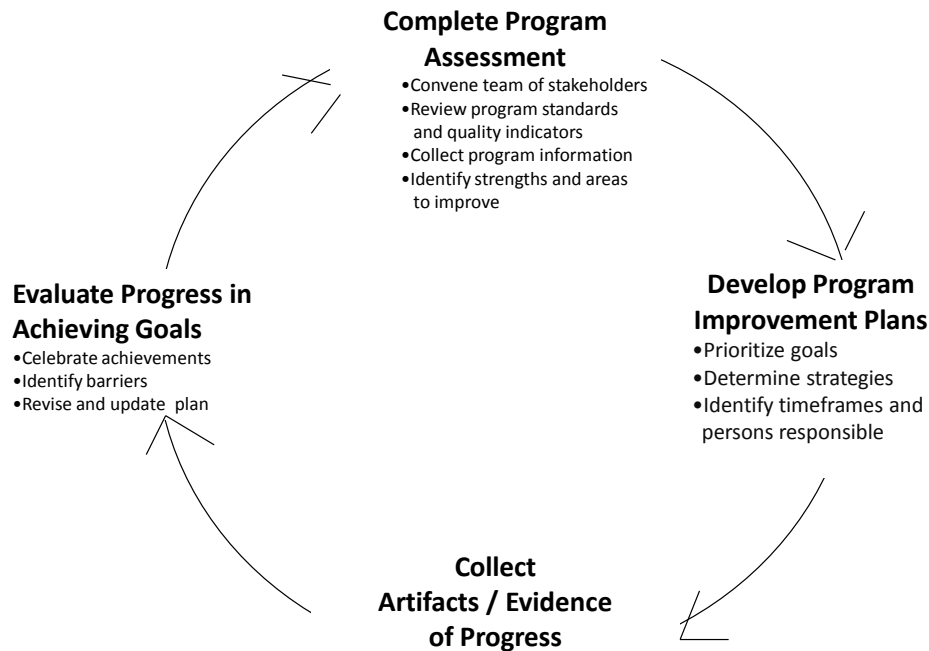
The completed goal sheets are then brought together and compiled into a single document that becomes the Program Improvement Plan. This Plan needs to be revisited regularly by program leaders to evaluate progress in achieving goals, identify barriers, and revise and update the plan, as needed, to ensure success.

Documenting Comprehensive Self-Assessment and Program Improvement Plans in a Program Portfolio

High-quality programs are able to demonstrate that they are on a cycle of continuous quality improvement. Many administrators have organized their self-assessment and program improvement documentation into a Program Portfolio. The Portfolio, a selection of work compiled over a period of time and used for assessing progress (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), assists administrators in charting and assessing their improvement efforts over time .

Consider organizing your Portfolio documentation to mirror the steps in the continuous improvement cycle as depicted below:

Charting Your Progress through Program Portfolios



Communicating Results

Finally, the plan for self-assessment should include strategies for communicating results. Think carefully about how the program will communicate the results of self-assessment, including both the strengths of the program and areas to be strengthened, to key stakeholders such as board members, staff, and parents and how they will stay informed of the program's progress in achieving program improvement goals.

Resources:

- *RI Early Learning Standards Level III Professional Development: The Administrator's Role in Implementing a Standards-Based Program*
- *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, 2005*
- *Head Start Self-Assessment: Your Foundation for Building Program Excellence*

Date: _____

Program Improvement Plan

GOAL:		
Strategies (include persons responsible)	Time Frame	Progress

GOAL:		
Strategies (include persons responsible)	Time Frame	Progress

Date we will evaluate progress and reassess goals: 1/10

Date: _____

Sample Program Improvement Plan

GOAL: Our program will develop and implement new program-wide practices to strengthen family engagement through effective communication

(10.3 The program uses a variety of methods to engage families in active two-way communication on an ongoing basis such as new family orientations, small group meetings, individual conversations, notes between program and home and written questionnaires.)

Strategies (include persons responsible)	Time Frame	Progress
The program administrator and administrative asst. will compile the results of the family surveys and share the results back with families and solicit their ideas for family engagement strategies	May '10	5/10 data compiled. Need to include results in agency newsletter
The program administrator will design a system for regular weekly communication between teachers and families and include this procedure in the written plans	October '10	
The administrator will form a committee of teachers and families to develop a year-long calendar of family engagement events that will occur within the program	October '10	
The administrator, administrative asst., and parent volunteers will create a family-friendly website with relevant information and updates for families	Nov '10-Feb '11	

Date we will evaluate progress and reassess goals: 1/11

